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Tier 1- Shared Vision of Learning

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Reflection Paper: Shared Vision of Learning

A plane in flight, a train heading down the track, and a cruise ship out on the ocean all have a destination. The destination is their goal, and it is what drives them. Once they reach their destination, one can see where each vehicle is supposed to be. Likewise, a school needs to know where it is headed; this is its mission, which is founded upon goals. What that school looks like once it accomplishes its mission is also crucial; this is known as its vision statement. It is the responsibility of the school leader to develop a vision statement with his or her stakeholders in order for the school environment to function like a well-oiled machine. "Vision is the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working for the organization" (16, Vision notebook, Day 1). Although a vision statement is challenging to create, it is all encompassing, and is crucial to the functioning of the school environment.

It is important for a school to have a clear vision statement because it is vital that people know where it is they are going and what is expected of them. Burt Nanus explains that "a mental picture or a vision can serve to guide people to change. A vision includes strategies for obtaining the desired outcomes and provides a picture of what schooling should look like and how educators can recreate or process this picture in real life." Without a vision, valuable time is wasted, and people are left floundering. In fact, Yoggi Berra states, "If you don't know where you are going, you probably aren't going to get there." Likewise, a school environment with no sense of direction will not be able to keep pace with the rapidly evolving world around them (Hickman & Silva). Consequently, a vision statement needs to be easy to understand and well articulated. According to Nanus, the vision statement also needs to be "appropriate for the organization and the times" (Nanus, 1992). Furthermore, it is a document that needs to be examined and reexamined so that is an integral, functioning, living part of the school

environment. “Vision formulation should be seen as a dynamic process, an integral part of the ongoing task of visionary leadership” (Nanus, 1992).

Another aspect of a vision statement is that it is very broad, yet very specific. According to Robert Fritz, “Vision has power, for through vision you can easily reach beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary. Vision can help you organize your actions, focus your values, and clearly see what is relevant in current reality...” (Fritz, 1984) Thus, a vision statement does not merely focus on the general behavior of the students and the teachers; it specifically states what they will be doing. For example, it may address specific patterns of engagement, such as stating that classroom instruction will be teacher-planned, but student-centered so that students are actively engaged in learning. “Effective vision statements are desirable, feasible, and credible...[and] focused on clarifying direction and priorities” (Dufour & Eaker, 2004). Therefore, a powerful vision statement also speaks to issues of assessment, student achievement, accountability, use of data, and state standards. Furthermore, it focuses on safety, cultural diversity, responsibilities, leadership qualities, and personal standards of behavior for all stakeholders. The idea at the outset of reaching this vision is to have a successfully functioning environment of lifelong learners, with the focus always being on student achievement.

Developing a vision statement is not an easy task. Thomas J. Peters states, “Developing a vision and values is a messy, artistic process. Living it convincingly is a passionate one, beyond any doubt.” First of all, when creating the vision statement, it is important to look at the following questions: *What are we doing?* or *How are we doing?*, and *How do we get to where we need to be?* These are the foundation upon which the vision statement is built. Next, it is essential to have stakeholder buy-in in order to have positive results and outcomes. In other words, a shared vision statement is not merely a set of mandates that are passed on to the stakeholders; it truly is a *shared* vision. “Vision had two fundamental elements. One is to provide a conceptual framework or paradigm for understanding the organization’s purpose—the vision includes a roadmap. The second important element is the emotional appeal: the part of the vision that has a motivational pull with which people can identify” (Tichy & Devanna, 1990). It is essential that the leader make the stakeholders (which may include administrators, staff, faculty, students,

and parents) feel that what they are doing is worthy. People will rise up if they are encouraged. In addition, the stakeholders need to feel a personal connection to the significance of what is going on in the school environment. Robert Fritz states, “When your vision becomes an entity on its own, you can develop a complex relationship with it” (Fritz, 1984). Therefore, it is essential that all stakeholders have the opportunity to have a part in the development of the vision statement. Not only does this create “buy-in,” but it also builds a sense of community so that everyone works together as a team with the same visions, goals, and priorities. With teamwork and buy-in, the vision will be reached; without it, the school may function, but it will never be cohesive. “Effective leaders help others to understand the necessity for a change and to accept a common vision of the desired outcome” (John Kotter).

“Beliefs shape visions, and visions drive missions. Visions are not accomplished, they are realized” (Schlechty, 1997). A powerful vision statement will motivate and challenge all stakeholders, help them to focus on what is really important, and align their energies along a mutual path. Additionally, a powerful vision statement will “set standards of excellence and reflect high ideals, ...inspire enthusiasm and encourage commitment, ... [and] reflect the uniqueness of the organization” (Nanus, 1992). Although it may be time consuming and challenging, developing a shared vision statement for a school community is pivotal. It becomes the criterion against which all decisions, choices, and courses of action are determined (23, Vision notebook, Day 2).